

**2004 SPRING SELF GOVERNANCE CONFERENCE
TALKING POINTS FOR THE HONORABLE TOMMY G. THOMPSON
TAPED REMARKS**

Good morning. Thank you for this opportunity to participate in the 2004 Spring Self-Governance Conference.

I have made working with American Indian and Alaska Native communities a priority for the Department of Health and Human Services since beginning my term as Secretary. I am so very proud of what we have accomplished together. During the past 3 years, we have worked in close partnership with self-governance tribes. In 2001, we worked together to create regulations to implement the permanent Self-Governance authority for IHS. In 2002 I sent a Report to the Congress, that you helped write. That report concluded that self-governance is feasible in other parts of HHS.

Deputy Secretary Allen and I have traveled to Indian country and met many of you in your home communities. In 2003 we met with representatives from 104 tribes while we were in Indian country. You have been gracious hosts and helped us understand the tremendous challenges you face. Thank you so much for your hospitality and counsel.

I had the opportunity to consult with tribal leaders in Anchorage, Alaska last August at the Region X Tribal Consultation Session. I made a commitment that we would increase tribal access to all HHS programs. We have made progress. Between 2001 and 2003 HHS resources provided to tribes or used for the benefit of tribes increased from \$3.9 to \$4.4 billion. However, the fact remains that we must do more. And we will.

The Medicare Prescription Drug and Modernization Act includes provisions of significant benefit to American Indian and Alaska Native tribes such as better federal reimbursement and prescription drug benefits.

In response to your advice we held our first CMS Tribal Technical Advisory Group (TTAG) meeting in February. This group will meet several times each year and is looking at the implementation of the changes to Medicare and other issues affecting Medicare and Medicaid for tribes.

In 2003 my Regional Directors held consultation sessions for the tribes in their regions. Representatives of more than 160 tribes and over 900 total participants attended these sessions. The sessions for 2004 are already well under way. Please participate – this year and in the years to come.

Finally, let me express my sincere appreciation to each of you for the wonderful commitment you have shown in working with HHS staff on the issues that concern us all. Through the strength of this partnership we will continue to accomplish so much.

You have my best wishes for a successful conference. God bless you all.